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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a video selection process that will assure educational practitioners of getting the most for their money; examines the steps necessary in an effective evaluation; and explains how to implement those steps. Teachers and librarians are advised to have more than one person evaluate a program, perhaps another teacher or students who will be using videotapes. The aspects of a video to be taken into consideration are briefly discussed, including production values, whether it comes with a teacher's guide, whether it encourages students to interact with the program, the accuracy and currency of the information being presented, whether the manner of presentation makes the material easy to understand, the pedagogical techniques used, the pacing of the program, whether it is fee from bias, and whether it supports the desired curriculum objectives. A program evaluation form for teacher use is attached. (ALF)

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VIDEOS:

SELECTING ONLY THE BEST

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VIDEOS:
SELECTING ONLY THE BEST

You're a science teacher trying to teach a lesson on carbon bonding, or a librarian searching for information to clarify for your students the way the card catalog works, or an Art Supervisor trying to find materials on abstract expressionism for your teachers. All of you have one thing in common--you preview videotapes for use in your class, school or district. Your biggest question is, how do you know that a video program will be an exceptional educational resource and one that teachers will want to use with students? What qualities make a program the best on the market?

In this article we will discuss a video selection process that will assure you of getting the most for your money. We will examine the steps necessary in an effective evaluation and explain how to implement those steps. Finally, we will provide you with a Program Evaluation Form for use in previewing your own programs.

To begin with, it is always wise to try to have more than one person evaluate a program. Perhaps you and a teacher in the subject area covered in the program could evaluate the program, either together or separately. When videos are to be used with students, having a class preview the program with you is very beneficial. A tape that is interesting to an adult will not always capture the attention of students accustomed to the glitz of commercial television.

When reviewing a video as opposed to a book, you will be looking at the program's production values. But what do we mean by production values? The term covers the quality of all aspects of the

program, including the script and the photography. The text should be smooth-flowing and easy to follow. The information given should be correct. The sound should be clear and unobscured by background noise or music, and the voice-over should be free from strong regional accents. The video should enhance the content of the script, be in itself a teaching tool, and be well-photographed with good color.

Does the video program come with a teacher's guide? A good teacher's guide will contain a synopsis of the program and pre- and post-viewing questions or activities. Many teacher's guides also give objectives for the series and/or individual programs. A well-written teacher's guide is an invaluable aid in the classroom because it provides ready-made activities and suggestions that can be integrated into the teacher's lesson plans.

Videos should encourage students to interact with the program, not be passive viewers. The script of a video may pose questions allowing the teacher to stop the tape and discuss possible answers, or it may rely on the activities in the teacher's guide to help students incorporate the information through additional projects. A well-constructed video will stimulate discussion and encourage a range of activities.

How accurate is the information being presented? Does it incorporate the latest information available on that subject? An additional reason for having a subject area teacher or curriculum supervisor preview the program is to be sure all information reflects the latest research. Just because you haven't seen the program before does not mean it is new. Companies looking for a new market often re-introduce programs after a number of years. Even if the information is

presented in an entertaining and educational manner, it is of little benefit to the students if it does not reflect current knowledge.

Are the clothing and hair styles up-to-date? Do houses and cars reflect today's culture? In some programs, the overall quality of the program will justify its purchase even if it is slightly out of date, but be aware that students, particularly in the upper grades, will tend to discount information in programs that appear outdated.

Is the material presented in a manner that is easy to understand? In a book students have text and pictures to refer to. Video has the ability to use animation, sound, graphics and real-life footage to make even the most complex subject interesting and easy to understand. Videotaped programs have the ability to take students on a 'field trip' to Southeast Asia, journey to Uranus, Neptune, Pluto and beyond, or to view life in a blood vessel. Through the use of computer animation, complex subjects such as the mole concept, or trigonometry can be examined and understood.

Was the material presented using the best pedagogical techniques? As in a story, the information must be presented in a manner that uses current teaching techniques. The series The Magic Library, produced by TVO, is a reading motivation series for grades two and three. A rabbit and three mice puppets excitedly wait in a library for the mermaid storyreader. As they wait, they chatter about all the books they would like to read, imparting to their listeners that reading is a fun activity. As the storyteller reads the books, the characters come to life, helping children perceive literature as more than words. Periodically, the children watching the program are asked questions. The teacher stops the tape for a discussion that could include predicting what will come next,

recalling what has happened so far, or evaluating one part of the show. When they have finished their discussion, the teacher continues the program. In most cases the video ends with the end of the story left for the viewers to complete. This motivates students to complete the book theirselves and perhaps read similar books.

How was the pacing of the program? Did it seem to drag along until you fell asleep, or was the material presented in a lively fashion. Even if all other elements in the video pass, poor timing can relegate the tape to dusty shelves, never to be used again. On the other hand, if the program tries to teach all facets of long division in one 15-minute program, students may feel overwhelmed by all the information in addition to having no idea how to actually complete a long division problem. A good way to judge the appropriateness of a show's pacing is to examine whether a lesson plan would cover the same amount of material. An exception to this rule would be if you wanted to use the program for preview or review only. If the program were to be used for preview purposes, students would be told they were not expected to remember all details, but were to try to grasp the overall concepts involved. For use as a review program, students would view the program with the idea of being sure they had grasped the whole picture and had not missed any components in their studies.

Was the program free from bias? This can be tricky because being free from bias means the program does not perpetuate racial, cultural or sexual stereotypes. This means that the scientist swaying in the wind at the top of the South American tree is a woman doing research. A man is shown reading books to children he is obviously caring for, and a boy is discussing his feelings about Roger, his pet frog, dying. Most of the

newer programs are models of multi-cultural, multi-racial casting. However, be careful of the sexual stereotypes that seem to be harder to eradicate.

And finally, after considering all the above points, be sure to consider whether the program supports your curriculum objectives. Producing a first-class video program is very expensive, and most production companies making educational programs do extensive research before they begin a series or program. They frequently use educational consultants to help make sure the content is appropriate for the grade level. Nevertheless, schools, districts and states often have very explicit objectives that must be taught. There are many wonderful programs that both you and your students would love to see, but if they don't fit in with stated objectives, you may be hard-pressed to justify purchasing the program.

Educational videos can help explain complicated material and reach students turned off by books. They are an exciting resource for educators to use with a media attuned generation of students. But in order to be sure of purchasing videos teachers will use and students will enjoy and learn from, a careful program evaluation must be completed. By using the program evaluation form included with this article, the time you spend previewing programs will be efficiently and effectively used.

Program Evaluation Form
Instructional Year

Series _____ Current date _____

Evaluator's Name _____ Title _____

School Division _____ School _____ Grades _____

	Poor <				>Excellent
1. The accuracy of the information presented was	1	2	3	4	5
2. The clarity of the information presented was	1	2	3	4	5
3. The organization of the material was	1	2	3	4	5
4. The program's ability to stimulate discussion was	1	2	3	4	5
5. The program's appeal to my students was/would be	1	2	3	4	5
6. The program's pacing was	1	2	3	4	5
7. The production quality of this program was	1	2	3	4	5

8. The information was free of bias? _____Yes _____No

9. The information grouping is _____individual _____small _____large

10. The series has instructional value? ____YES ____NO
If YES, please mark program use(s): _____Drill & Practice _____Simulation
_____Tutorial _____Problem Solving _____Teaching Utility _____Informational
_____Class Management _____Educational Game _____
_____Other_____.

11. The goals of this series support my school's curriculum? ____YES ____ NO

12. Please indicate the grade levels for which this series is most appropriate. _____

COMMENTS

Your comments on individual programs are included in our evaluation process and are very important to us. Use the space below or attach any additional comments.